

Christmas Vigil – Children’s Mass December 24, 2008

Readings: Isaiah 62:1-5; Acts 13:16-17, 22-25; Matthew 1:18-25

Happy Birthday Jesus

Well, we finally made it to this day. There has been a lot of excitement. We had a Christmas play here at church. There have been lights and decorations and Christmas trees; Christmas carols on the radio; Christmas specials on television; shopping in the malls. And this year we have had a big dose of snow to help get us in the Christmas spirit. I know it made a lot of you happy because it meant an extra day off from school.

Yes, it is a time of excitement and magic in the air. Santa is making last minute preparations for his big trip tonight to deliver toys to all the good little boys and girls. He has his big book to check to see who has been naughty and who has been nice; a book filled with all of your names. I hope you have all been good this year. I hope you have been good this year, but not so you will get presents, but because it is the right thing to do. Your parents try to bring you up so that you will behave yourselves. They may give you rewards for good behavior sometimes and they may have to punish you sometimes when you are bad. They do these things to try to teach you right from wrong. They take good care of you and give you the things that you need and all they ask for in return is your love. If you love your parents, you will do the right things because you want to make them happy. You know it will hurt their feelings if you are sassy, or if you get in trouble at school. You should want to do well in school, not out of fear of punishment if you don’t, or because you’ll be rewarded with extra allowance for good grades, but because you want to try hard to make your parents proud of your effort. So it’s important to do the right things for the right reasons.

God is a great parent to us and He wants us to behave properly, just like our mothers and fathers do. God doesn’t want us to sin. He offers us the reward of heaven for being good. He may punish us if we are bad. But God wants us all to be good because we love Him and we want to do the right thing to make Him happy. Just like our parents, God loves each and every one of us even when we misbehave; but it doesn’t make him happy. We should come to church every Sunday morning not because we are afraid that God is going to punish if we don’t. We should come because we know that God loves us and we want to follow His commandments because we love Him in return.

Kind of like Santa, God knows each and every one of you names. God knows you so well that He not only knows your name, but He has even counted all the hairs on your head and cares about you very much. And that is why He sent Jesus to be with us. And we know that Mary was going to be His mother, and we heard today in our gospel story that St. Joseph was going to be his foster father, to help take care of Him as a child. But St. Joseph was a little confused about who this baby was because he and Mary weren’t even married yet. And so God sent an angel to speak to him while he was sleeping to explain it to him.

Now St. Joseph was a very holy man and we went to the synagogue regularly to read and study the scriptures, just like we come to church to hear the scripture and read our bibles at home. And in the scriptures that St. Joseph knew very well there were a lot of

names and stories of people who were naughty and nice. And there was a story from a prophet named Isaiah who had lived 700 years before St. Joseph. And God told Isaiah to write a story to tell the people that in the future a “virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means ‘God is with us.’” So when the angel came and visited Joseph and spoke to him, Joseph remembered the words of Isaiah’s story and then he understood. Mary was the virgin that Isaiah had written about, and the child in her womb was the Son of God. God was coming to be with us, to be one of us. And that is the symbolism we get from the name Emmanuel.

But the angel also told Joseph to give the child a new name, and that name was Jesus. The name Jesus comes from the Hebrew name Joshua which means “God saves”. The child born on that first Christmas Day in the stable in Bethlehem was Emmanuel who came to be God with us, and He was now known as Jesus, who came to be our Savior.

God came to be with us and to be our Savior because He loves us very much. He wants us to love Him in return just like our parents want us to love them. And just like our parents, God wants us to show our love by doing good things and trying to avoid doing bad things. He gives us so many things. He gave us His Son Jesus and tonight we celebrate His birthday. With all the excitement of presents and toys and candy today, try to remember why we are celebrating. It is a birthday party for Jesus. He is the guest of honor, do not forget about Him. When you go to a birthday party, it is not to get presents but to give a present to the guest of honor. And the only present Jesus wants from you is your love.

Deacon Joe Hulway